





Archim. Ignatios

**THE BATH OF
THE SOUL**



**END TIMES PUBLISHING
2024**

Translated from the original Greek:

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Front Cover: The Mystery of Repentance. Detail from
the Dining Hall of the Paraclete Monastery.

PREFACE

PERHAPS, you have approached Confession a few other times, and you would certainly like to learn more about this sacred Mystery, which gives so much relief and peace to your soul. You would also like to learn how to approach it better and use the holy and precious opportunity God gives you through his Mystery more efficiently.

Perhaps, however, you are one of those who have not yet known the peace and joy that Confession gives. You were not given the right opportunity. You do not see the necessity of Confession. You do not know that you must confess. However, you would like to be informed and learn...

This booklet, in its few lines, aims precisely at that. To give those who have a thirst for learning the opportunity to know the basics about the great Mystery of Confession—this “bath of the soul”—to help them make a good Confession, to feel the relief and joy that Confession brings, a joy that is the opposite of the joy of heaven, because as Christ said: “There is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.”

First, we will answer your primary question:

WHY SHOULD I CONFESS?

You will confess to find your peace and joy. You are distressed and sad. Many thoughts and anxieties torment your soul. You think that the cause of your anxiety is suffering, illness, the difficulties you encounter... But in reality, the essential reason lies elsewhere. A person's joy and sorrow have their source in their conscience. No matter how cloudy it may be outside, a person enjoys his life when it is peaceful and does not complain. But when the conscience cries out that you are guilty, then even in the most enviable health, the greatest wealth, and the most vivid pleasures, you will be the unhappy one. You will be another Damocles, who will see the sword of divine justice hanging over your head. Only Confession has the power to redeem you from this situation because the forgiveness of your sins happens only through it and, therefore, the peace of your conscience is achieved.

You will confess so that your soul may once again acquire the purity and beauty that God gave it. Your deviations and sins are those that contaminate and disfigure your soul, that make it unrecognisable, so much so that God and, little by little, people also abhor it. Pay attention, and you will see how repulsive the selfish, the envious, the drunkard, and the criminal become, no matter how beautiful he may be on the outside.

You will also confess because this is the commandment of God. By the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah, God commanded: "Wash yourselves and be clean; put away the evils from your souls." The Forerunner John, but also our Lord himself, called to repentance: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And what Christian soul is not moved when reading the parable of the Prodigal Son, whose true repentance and sincere confession led to regaining his first place in his Father's house?

So, confession is a necessity.

WHERE SHALL I CONFESS?

Not in front of the icon nor directly to God. Since you have decided to confess, you are obliged to make Confession as Christ and the Church have defined it and not as you think. How often have you said it to the icon or directly to God? What response have you received? And how are you sure that you made a good Confession, since for many of your mistakes, you probably did not consider it necessary to tell them because you did not know that they were sins? And after such a Confession, what instructions and advice did you receive to correct your life?

If what you say is correct, then what I will tell you now will also be accurate: When you are sick, you do not need to go to the doctor. Take a photo of the doctor and tell her where you hurt and how you feel!

No! To confess, you will go to the Priest, the Spiritual Father, who God charges with this work specifically. The Lord, after His Resurrection, on the evening of the first day of the Resurrection, gave the Apostles this special authority by breathing onto them the Holy Spirit and with these weighty words: "Receive the Holy Spirit; if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23).

Saint John Chrysostom says the following, interpreting these words of the Lord: "Those who dwell here on earth were allowed to rule over the things in heaven and received authority, which God gave neither to angels nor archangels, for He did not say to them, 'Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' Whatever the Priests do here on earth (through the Mystery of Confession), God from heaven ratifies these things, and the Lord confirms the decision of His servants, the Priests..."

"Repent, you who have gone astray, return to your heart" (Isaiah, 46:8)

NO EXCUSES

Despite all this, some justify themselves by saying there are no good Priests and suitable Confessors today. This is a great inaccuracy. Today, there are more good Confessors than ever before. All we need to do is seek to find them.

Let us do for the health of the soul what we do for the health of the body. When we get sick, we ask who the good doctor is. We are willing to travel to Europe and America, too. Why should we not do the same for our souls?

I would ask you something else: Do you consider what kind of person your doctor, pharmacist, or baker is? Do you not go only to get what you need without caring who these people are?

Then, do not forget that the grace of the Sacrament does not depend on the person of the Priest. The forgiveness of your sins, which you go to Confession to receive, does not come from the Priest but God Himself. If you pay attention, you will hear, at the end of Confession, the Priest, after reading the prayer, say to you the following: "The grace of the Holy Spirit, (not I), through my insignificance, has forgiven you and has absolved you."

WHEN?

You must confess as soon as possible without wasting any time. Do not say: I will go to confession later. Time is not in your power. How many have the enemy of our souls, the devil, not laughed at and destroyed this way? The more you postpone, the more sins will accumulate. The more time passes, your sins will become heavier and worse. Do not imagine that the great sinners have reached their end all by themselves. They began with minor sins, and little by little, without the forgiveness and strengthening of Confession, their souls became accustomed to the atmosphere and life of sin. Thus, they progressed from the smallest to the most significant sins without realising it. With Confession, you remove the seeds of evil from the field of your soul, which the devil sows and you do not allow them to take root and grow. Moreover, the more you postpone confession, the more difficult it seems to you to approach the Spiritual Father.

Do not say to yourself: I will repent and confess when I grow old. Who promises you that you will grow old? And how do you imagine you will have the endurance needed to repent when you know how weak the will, the thought, and all the powers of an old person become?

Don't think: Now I am very sinful. I will correct myself little by little, and then I will confess. Woe to the seriously ill person if he said he would get better and then go to the doctor.

Do not leave going to the Spiritual Father to the last moment, on the eve of the great Feasts. Then there are so many waiting to confess that it is impossible for either you or him to make a good Confession.

When, then, will you confess?

How often do you wash? How often do you wash your clothes? Do you remain unwashed and dirty, saying you will be cleansed at Christmas or Easter? Do you leave it, even after an hour, to seek the help of a doctor? What you do for your body, you will do for your soul. As soon as you feel the first dirt, the first wound, the first burden of sin, you will run away immediately without delay.

"Foolishly, I sprang away from Thy great fatherly glory and dispersed in wicked deeds the riches that Thou didst give me. With the Prodigal, I therefore cry unto Thee now: I have sinned against Thee, O compassionate Father. But receive me in repentance; make me as one of Thy hired servants, O Lord" (Kontakion of the Sunday of the Prodigal Son).

HOW SHALL I CONFESS?

Just as to go to the doctor, you must understand that you are sick, so to begin to confess, you must first realise that you are a sinner. Many think that they have no sins or that their sins are insignificant and light; after all, they have so many excuses for their mistakes. However, the word of God categorically affirms that there is no one righteous, "not even one," and warns us that "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Whatever our sins are, they are sins that required Christ to be crucified for their forgiveness.

If you say that you have no sins or that your sins are light and justified, this means that you do not know the law of God as well as you should. Here, we will help you quickly and simply examine yourself in the light of the law of God and discover and identify your sins. The list of these questions is not exhaustive and does not include – because it is not easy – all the cases in which we can be guilty of the divine law. However, it will be a good beginning and sufficient help for you to examine yourself well.

Therefore, do not start unprepared for Confession. Choose a quiet place and at a quiet time, put yourself down, and examine yourself impartially and without extenuating circumstances.

A.

Examine first if your duties towards God are in order:

What is your faith and your trust in God? Do you despair and murmur against God in the difficulties of your life? Do you believe in dreams and superstitions? Do you enlighten and lead others to observe various superstitions? Have you ever resorted to magic, spiritualism, etc.? Have you ever been carried away by heretical teachings? Do you debate with Jehovah's Witnesses or other heretics? Do you go to their meetings or read their books? Do you leave your mouth free so that inappropriate words, insults, slander, and curses come out of it? Have you sworn without reason or, worse, falsely? Do you pray and attend church regularly? Do you stand in prayer and in Church with the required reverence? Do you keep the Sunday Sabbath, the fasts (as long as you are healthy) and the other regulations of our Church?

B'

Then, examine your behaviour towards others:

Do you show the obedience and respect due to Priests, parents, teachers and your elders? Do you honour them and help them with their needs? Do you tend to criticise or slander Priests or participate in discussions where the clergy are slandered and commented on?

If you are a father or mother, do you avoid having children?

Do you take proper care of your children? Do you care for their souls? Are you careful to set a good example for them?

Do you insult or curse your children?

Do you prevent your children from attending Catechism School or push them into secular life?

Do you get upset if one of your children has expressed a desire to become a clergyman or to dedicate himself to Christ and do everything to prevent it?

Do you create scenes and incidents or use words that create coldness or discord between your daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, or relatives?

How do you behave towards your subordinates as an employer or a supervisor? Do you mistreat them? If you are a worker or an employee, are you conscientious in your work?

C.

Do you hinder others from attending church or from performing their religious duties? Do you mock those who confess and receive communion regularly and generally those who try to live the Christian life?

Also, examine whether you love everyone, whether you forgive those who have harmed you, whether you get angry, whether you have harmed anyone, whether you appear inconsistent in your obligations, whether in your profession you work honestly, without fraud, dishonest gain, etc.

Do you succumb to the serious sins of gambling, slander, and condemnation?...

D'

Do you pay attention to what you read, listen to, and discuss? Do you frequent shows that offend morality, entertainment, dances, etc.? Do you guard the chastity of your eyes, thoughts, words, and actions?

Are you carried away by fashion, beauty, and coquetry, creating unnecessary expenses, neglecting other, more serious duties, or wasting your precious time?

Have you committed any carnal sin with any person?

If you are a young man or woman, are you exposing yourself to conversations and associations that will lead you perhaps to moral deviations?

Are you becoming a cause for scandal with your clothing, looks, words, and general careless behaviour?

If you are engaged, are you careful about the purity of your body and soul until the day of your wedding?

If you are a spouse, have you always maintained marital fidelity?

“Return, my sons, return, and I will heal your brokenness.” (Jeremiah 3:22)

AFTER THE EXAMINATION

After examining your conscience as best you can, you will have to feel sorrow and crushed in the depths of your soul. For with your sins, you have offended God. You, the little man, offended the great God. You, the sinful man, offended the Holy God. The creature offended its Creator. The One in whose hands your life and your existence are. The One to whom the universe is subject at a single gesture. And not only that, but you have also appeared ungrateful to your greatest benefactor. To Him who gives you all good things. To Him who tolerates you and does not punish you for your sins. To Him who did not spare His Son but delivered Him up to the cruel and dishonourable death of the Cross for your salvation.

You will be sad and grieved for all this. Then, your repentance will be genuine. Then God will accept your Confession. "A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit, a heart that is broken and humbled, God will not despise." All who truly repented did so. David said: "I wash my bed every night; I water my couch with my tears." That harlot woman washed the feet of the Saviour with her tears. The Apostle Peter denied Christ, but as soon as he realised his mistake, "he went outside and wept bitterly."

With this sorrow and compunction, you should set out for the Confessional.

"Grant me compunction, estrangement from evils and perfect amendment, for I am sunk in the depths of bodily passions and separated far from Thee, O God, the King of all; and I have no other hope but Thee. In the abundance of Thy goodness save me, the prodigal, O Jesus all-powerful, the Saviour of our souls"
(Prosomoion Compunctionate Vespers, 4th Tone)

GO TO THE SPIRITUAL FATHER

Confess all your sins with directness and sincerity. Know that if you do not confess even one sin, not only are you not forgiven for the sins you have confessed, but you have committed an even graver sin because you thought you could hide from God, who knows everything. Do not allow yourself to be carried away by the feeling of fear that the Devil creates in you at that moment. One should be afraid at the moment of sinning, not at the moment of confession.

Consider how much love God shows in this regard; who does not require that your sins be revealed before many people, as human justice requires, but only before the Priest, who will be the only person who will learn of your errors. And the Spiritual Father is obliged—under penalty of excommunication—to observe the mysteries of Confession sacredly and inviolably, not only in his private conversations but also before any judicial or political authority.

Think, moreover, that our sins must at some time be revealed. And they will be revealed either here—to your Spiritual Father, when they will be forgiven—or on the day of Judgment in the presence of billions of people, without hope of forgiveness, but only to our shame and eternal punishment. Where, then, is it preferable to reveal your sins?

Consider also, what would you say about the one who, while going to the doctor, is too ashamed to show him his wounds and the sick members of his body? How can this man expect healing? To secure yourself and overcome this deadly danger from the beginning, confess the sin you are most ashamed of first.

“For I will declare mine iniquity, and be distressed for my sin”
(Ps. 37:19).

BE CAREFUL WHEN CONFESSING

Do not say vaguely and generally: I am a sinner. Just as the sick person does not simply tell the doctor, I am ill. Clearly confess the nature of each of your sins and whether you have fallen into them once or many times.

Do not wait for the Spiritual Father to ask you: "First, tell me your sins so that you may be justified." Accuse only yourself. Do not seek to shift the burden on others, as Adam and Eve did. Do not try to justify yourself.

If the Apostle Paul said he was the chief of sinners, what should we say?

QUIT SPEAKING, LISTEN

Listen with great attention to what the Spiritual Father will tell you. Write his suggestions and advice in the breadth of your heart, with the same and greater attention with which a sick person listens to the doctor's instructions regarding the medicines he should take and the diet he should follow. Accept it with joy and try to apply the "rule" that he will set for you precisely and meticulously. Be especially careful not to approach the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist without the permission of the Spiritualist.

When your Confession is made in this manner, as we have explained so far, you will personally experience the great results and the inexpressible peace and joy that good Confession brings to the soul.

"The Lamb of God, who takes away all sins,
take away from me the heavy yoke of sin, and
as one who is merciful, grant me tears of
contrition."

(From the Great Canon)

AFTER CONFESSION

After you have confessed, you need to pay more attention to your life.

Now that the Lord has forgiven you and your soul has been cleansed from the pollution of sin, be careful not to grieve God again with your sins. Protect yourself from everything that can re-defile your soul. You must know that repentance, Christian education and the Christian life are not a matter of one day but a work that must occupy you throughout your entire life.

Rest assured, then, that you have repented and confessed, but take care to follow the good path that God has shown you, which will lead you to true happiness.

“Blessed are those whose iniquities are
forgiven and whose sins are covered”
(Ps. 111:1)

"FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT"

Make a firm and final decision to fight against every sin and be ready for every sacrifice to keep God's will. This is the noblest struggle. The struggle that redeems man from anguish and creates for him the most profound joy. Struggle, remembering that you experience the greatest satisfaction after a little effort every time you struggle to overcome temptation. At the same time, if you yielded to the demands of sin, after a bit of pleasure, you experienced the greatest disappointment and disgust. Struggle... And if in this struggle you are wounded, do not be discouraged. Hurry once more, but always hurry to the hospital of Christ, Confession. You will always find the healing, forgiveness, and strength to continue your struggle.

"What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?"
(Mark 8:36)

USE THE APPROPRIATE MEANS

Take care to study and learn the Law of God better. Do not neglect to ask God for strength and encouragement in prayer so that you can struggle against sin. In particular, do not neglect regular church attendance and the heavenly food of our soul, the Body and Blood of the Lord, from which whoever feeds receives all that he needs to maintain and develop his soul.

"There is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:10)

THIS IS CONFESSION

Confession refines man's life, brings peace to his soul, and gives him instructions and directions for the struggle of life. It is a true blessing in our lives because it reconciles people, grants them the forgiveness of their sins, and, moreover, prepares them to receive within themselves the great gift of the Body and Blood of Christ.

Love it with all your heart, and go to it as often as possible. Thus, you will experience and see new days in your life, days of true joy and peace.

PRAYERS

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy" (Ps. 50:1).

Lord, support me.
(St. Paisios the Great)

Lord Jesus Christ, my God, give me a good day, sinless and spotless.

Lord, do not abandon me.

Lord, do not depart from me.

Lord, extend to me a helping hand.

Lord, support me in your fear.

Lord, implant this and your love in my heart.

Lord, teach me to do your will,

Lord, give me weeping endurance and repentance and the memory of death.

Lord, free me from everything yourself ...

Bring me to the Cross, which is salvation for the lost, rest for the weary, life for the dead.

Come, and salvation will come to earth and joy to heaven.

Prayer of the "lost sheep"

(St. Ambrose of Milan)

Come, Lord Jesus. Seek your servant, the lost sheep; come, Shepherd. Leave the other ninety-nine and seek the one, the lost one. Come to me, where wolves are waiting for me. Come to me, the one expelled from paradise. Come and find me, who am seeking You. Seek me, receive me, take me to You. You can find the one you are seeking. Accept to gather what you find. Put what you have gathered on Your shoulder. A burden of mercy is not too heavy for You.

Come, then, Lord. Come, Lord, seek Your sheep. Come, You, the same ... Bring me to the Cross, which is salvation for the lost, rest for the weary, life for the dead. Come, and salvation will come on earth and joy in heaven.

Prayer at the twilight of life

(St. Makarios of Egypt)

My God, You have come in the last days to save us, You, who in the twilight drove Adam from paradise and opened paradise again for him, in the name of Your death on the cross, have mercy on me now, when the end of my life is approaching, now, when evening has come upon me. Time is too short to wash away all my filth. I cannot live so many years so as to eliminate the multitude of my errors.

Have mercy on me, Lord, before Your terrible judgment. Have mercy on me, my God, when mercy will have been exhausted. Cast a peaceful and sweet look upon me at the hour when You will judge with severity. Heal me from now on, and I will be healthy. Raise me up with Your mercy and lead me to repentance so I may meet You there on high with a clean face. Do not leave me in the power of my enemies, Lord, so I do not become prey to those who set snares for my soul so that I may not be deprived of Your grace and may not be stripped of the gifts of the Spirit.

I will wash, Lord, the filth of my garment so that I may not fall into the outer darkness with him who was not deemed worthy of the wedding feast. Preserve the oil of good stewards in my lamp so that I may not be excluded like the foolish virgins. Deliver me, Lord, from that terrible word, which You will address to those You will have on Your left hand; "I do not know you." With the Blood of the Cross, which You shed for my sake, free me. With Your mercy, quicken me, that I may guard the martyrdom of Your word, live for Your glory and enjoy the joy of Your kingdom, which lasts forever and ever. Amen.